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lindsay leigh bentley

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ABOUT LINDSAY



I AM RYLAND – THE STORY OF A MALE-IDENTIFYING LITTLE GIRL WHO DIDN'T TRANSITION

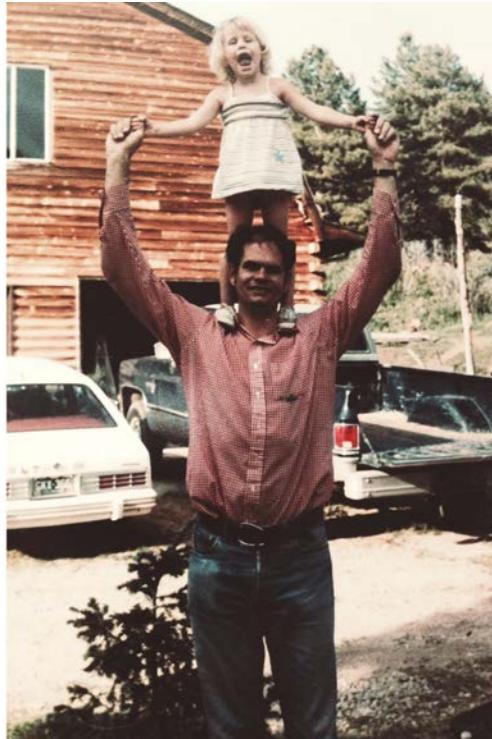
JUNE 30, 2014 BY LINDSAYLEIGHBENTLEY — 4,000 COMMENTS

I have been shying away from highly controversial topics on this blog recently because I just couldn't take the drama that naturally associates with it. But I keep hearing the story of Ryland, a child who was born a female, whose parents have transitioned her to male at 5 years old. You can see the full story [HERE](#), but in short, because their daughter identified herself as a boy, and liked "boy" things as opposed to "girl" things, they cut off her hair, bought her "boy" clothes, and have begun telling her, and others, that she is a boy.



I have no degree in early childhood development, nor have I studied psychology. I didn't even graduate from College.

I am also not here to pass judgement on Ryland's parents. I believe that they are doing what they believe to be the most loving thing for their child. I'm simply sharing my story because I see so much of my 5-year-old self in this child.



I was born the second daughter to two loving, amazing, supportive parents. They would go on to have 2 more daughters. The four of us couldn't be more different, even down to our hair and eye color. Our parents embraced our differences and allowed us to grow as individuals, not concerned with the social "norms" for girls. I often joke that I was the boy my dad never had. My dad is a free spirit, 100% unconcerned with what people think of him, and he thought nothing of "out of the box" behavior. I function more as a firstborn than a second born (however, this does not *make me the firstborn*, amiright?)

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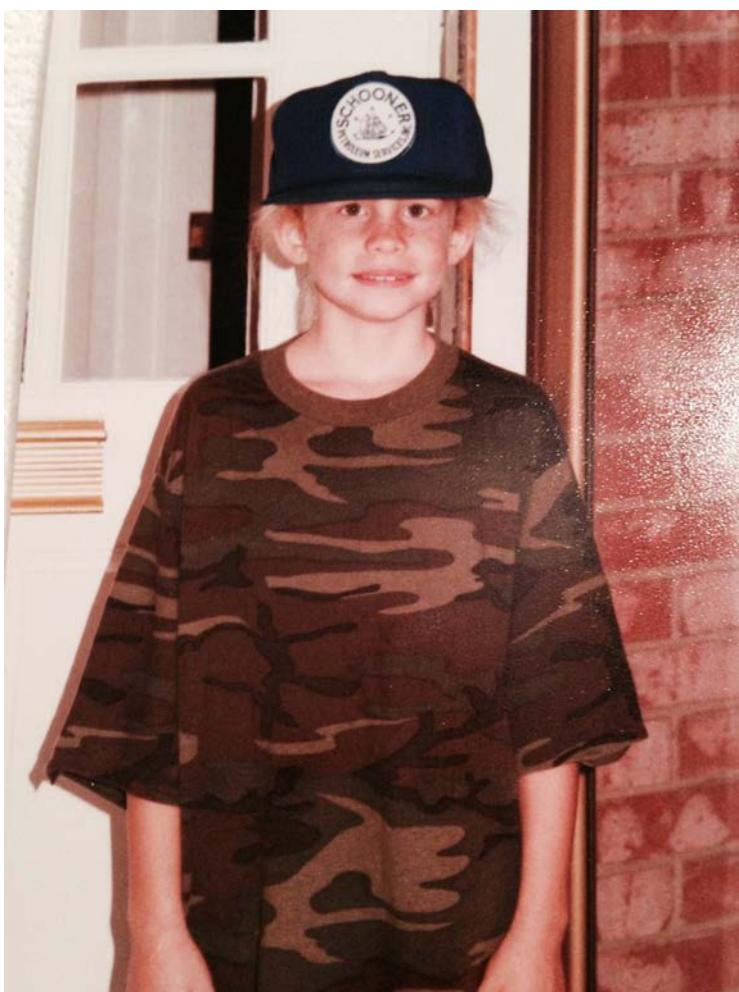


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Anyhow, even as a baby I seemed to prefer "boy" things. I was rough, tough, and daring. My parents had to cut my curly hair short because I would twist it into knots and refused to let my parents brush it. I once managed to make my way onto the second story roof, and was gleefully running around, as my parents had simultaneous panic-attacks. My toys of choice were sticks, sling-shots, bows & arrows, guns, mud, motorcycles, and monsters. When my sister and I picked out "My Little Ponies" I chose a blue one, and promptly cut all of that lustrous long hair off as short as possible. My barbie also got the chop.

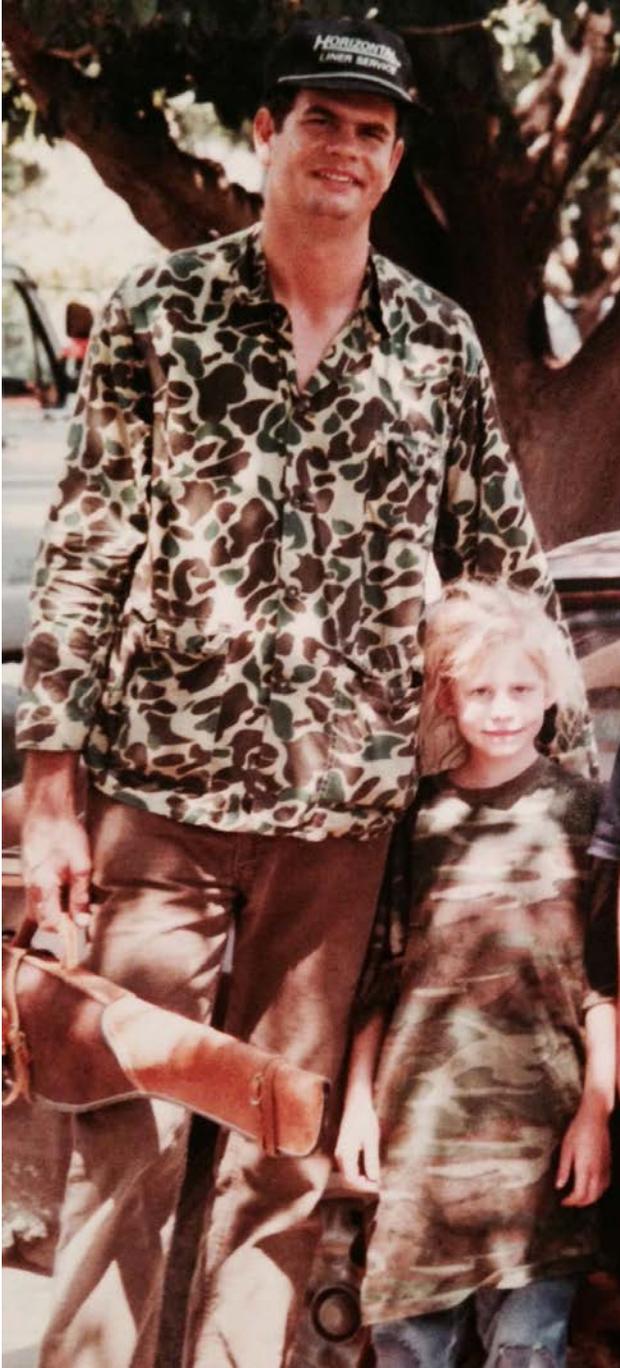
I loved going on hunting trips with my dad and thought it was amazing when he taught me to pop the head off a dove. (PETA, please, no...just. No.)



I wanted to be a boy. *Desperately wanted to be a boy.* I thought boys had more fun. *I felt like a boy* in the way that our society views genders. I liked blue and green more than pink and purple. I remember sitting up as high as I could climb in our huge mulberry tree, bow & arrow in hand, trying to kiss my

elbow (a neighbor lady had told me that if I could accomplish this, that I would turn into a boy, which was what I wanted in that moment, as a child, more than anything.)

Thankfully, my parents didn't adhere to the archaic stereotypes that "boys like blue" and "girls like pink;" that "boys play with dinosaurs, and girls play with dolls." **Had they told me that liking these things made me a boy, I would have concluded that I was a boy.**

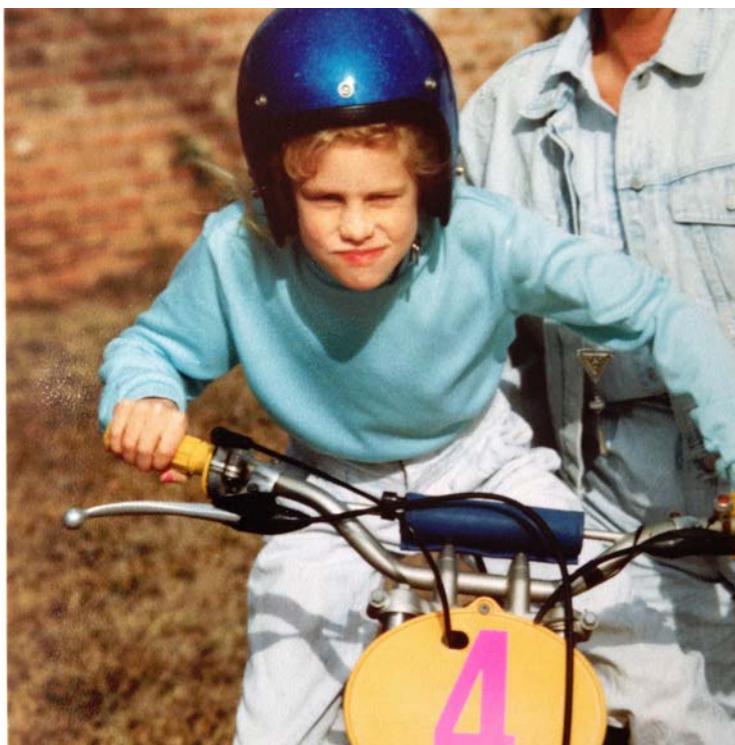


They just let me be me. They let me be a girl who wore jeans more often than skirts. They let me play with slingshots rather than princess wands. They didn't conclude that I was gay, or transgender. They didn't put me in a box that would shape my future, at the expense of my own free will.

My best friends growing up, until around the age of 14, were boys. Sure, I had girl friends, but my best friends, the ones I identified with most, were boys. Every evening after dinner I would go outside and play football with my neighbor friend, Tom. My very best friend in the world was a boy named Robin. His wife is a friend of mine to this day. My friend Andrew and I would make swords out of plywood and burn our names in them with soldering irons. We made elaborate models of "trampoline worlds" because, bouncing around is waaaay better than walking, right? I wished so badly that I could play baseball on my friend Jaime's team with him.

At Thanksgiving we would play "cowboys & indians" with my cousins and I was always, always, the wild Indian. Never the prairie maiden who had been captured....booooooring.

I even remember one Christmas, my sister and I were given porcelain figurine music boxes from my parents. Her's was of a girl with a lamb, mine a shepherd boy with a donkey. They did this not because they considered me a boy, but because they knew I would like that one more. I thought shepherd boys with donkeys were a heck of a lot more fun than a pretty blonde girl with a lamb. Lambs are dumb. Donkeys are crazy, wild, and fun! My parents were just fine with me identifying more with the dirty, tough shepherd.



I hesitate to even add, this but I feel it is so important: I even had an experience, around age 7, where a friend (girl) of mine experimented together during a sleepover. Looking back, I believe she had been molested and was acting out what had been done to her. This doesn't make me transgender. It doesn't make me a lesbian. It made me a child growing up in a broken world.

In this day and age, I probably could have been labeled as transgender. They would cut my hair off short (because, all boys have short hair, right?) I would be given "boy" clothes to wear, blue walls in my room rather than pink, and be told to pretend to have a penis, at least until I could have one surgically added. Had this happened, I can not even imagine how traumatic puberty would have been for me.

Fast forward to age 14/15 (late bloomer here) and I finally started going through puberty. I had never really thought of the opposite sex in a sexual manner before. My attraction was immediately, and is to this day, towards men. At the risk of going all Shania on you, I "feel" like a woman. Had my parents decided, at age 5, that I was a boy, I can not imagine the confusion that I would have experienced during my teen years.

I still love some stereotypical "male" things. Football remains my absolute favorite sport to watch. I love fixing things around the house, and honestly, am often better at it than my husband. I prefer to go barefoot and struggle to remember to wash my hair and pluck my eyebrows. I enjoy doing mechanical things, and am not afraid to stand my own against jerky sub-contractors. I hate clothes shopping. I like having muscles. I love to exercise, and enjoy feeling really strong. I am thankful that I feel confident to manage our home on my own while my husband travels. I prefer Bourbon over a Cosmopolitan.

But I also love being a woman. I love to feel beautiful, especially when I have an event with my husband. I love putting on an apron and creating elaborate meals for friends and family. I love nursing my babies. I loooooove going to the spa.



My husband is amazing at design and is the decorator/designer for our home. He does most of the

clothes shopping for both of us, and has no interest in learning how to change the oil in our car. He is creative and artistic. But he also loves to go hunting and fishing and has to handle any dead little animal that we find on our property because I can't handle that stuff.

These things don't make us gay or transgender, they make us *unique human beings*.

Because my parents never forced me to, I never considered if some of the things that I enjoyed were "boy" things or "girl" things, I was just me. When we begin to tell boys that they must act "this" way, and that girls should act "that" way, and that if they don't, they are transgender; we put children in these tiny boxes that create confusion, frustration, and sometimes, lifelong psychological and emotional damage.

Our oldest son had very long, wavy blond hair for the first 3 years of his life until he requested to have a haircut like his grandpa. People sometimes commented that they thought he was a girl, but I was often confused for a boy as a child so I didn't worry about it. He once came to me and asked if pink was a girl color, because someone had told him that it was, and he liked pink. "No. I responded. Pink is just a color." Fully satisfied, it remained his favorite color for the rest of that week, at which point he moved on to orange, or green or purple or something else. I want my children to be fully accepted for their interests, without making those interests define the core of who they are. Henry can like pink just as much as I can like tearing up concrete without it defining our gender.



It grieves me to think of what Ryland's parents may be robbing her of by choosing a gender for her at such a young age. I hope that, if/when she decides that she is a woman, that they will support her in this. That they won't force her into their agenda to save face.

I am writing this to offer another perspective. Because I believe in freedom. I believe that people should be free to have interests that don't fit the social norm. That children should be allowed to be children. With all of their silly, fantastical play. They should be allowed to believe that they are a dog, a Superhero, a Mommy, or a rock.

I am so thankful that my parents gave me the freedom to act more boyish than my sisters. I am thankful that they didn't freak out, or make any life-altering decisions for me. I am so thankful that, for a season of my life, I was allowed to act more like a stereotypical boy than a girl. I am also thankful that I was allowed to become more feminine later in life, when it felt natural to do so.

I hope that Ryland's parents will offer her this same freedom.

live well. be well.

Lindsay

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